

Manny Wants Hatton, Floyd, Margarito

Written by Ron Borges

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While many things have been projected for Manny Pacquiao this year one thing is set – he won't ever defend the WBC lightweight title he won from David Diaz. Hence, if Pacquiao's long-time nemesis Juan Manuel Marquez wants to fight him again he will have to do more than put on a good show against former lightweight champion Juan Diaz. He'll have to put on weight.

That is the position taken by Pacquiao's trainer and confidante, Freddie Roach, who said from his gym in Hollywood Wednesday afternoon that boxing's most popular fighter has no intention of ever again fighting at 135 pounds.

"If Marquez wants to come up to 140 we'll fight him again," Roach said of the man who fought a draw and lost a razor-thin split decision to Pacquiao and then moved up to 135 pounds to pursue him further only to see Pacquiao move on up to welterweight.

"We won't fight at 135. Manny's natural weight is 140. We came in at 142 for the (welterweight) fight with (Oscar) De La Hoya. Manny had to lose two pounds the day of the fight last June against Diaz. He's not a lightweight.

"He's just as fast and much stronger at 140 as he was at 126 and 135. Manny won't see 135 again."

Whether or not that means he won't see Marquez again only time will tell, but Roach said the final small negotiations over a venue are being worked out for Pacquiao to challenge 140-pound champion Ricky Hatton (he must hold some belt with so many of them out there) May 2 so his short-term future is finalized. Although Hatton would have to be considered the naturally bigger man, De La Hoya had an even larger advantage in that regard over Pacquiao and it made no difference so Roach has no concerns over talk of natural strength and all of that.

In fact, Roach sounded as if he had few real concerns about what Pacquiao can expect from the aggressive Brit with the ever expanding and contracting waist line. That includes Hatton's new trainer, Roach's own arch nemesis Floyd Mayweather, Sr.

"I think it's a real good fight for us," Roach said. "Hatton will help draw a big crowd and it's another title for Manny.

"The weight is not a problem for Manny. His natural weight is 140 now. He's not going up in weight. That's what he weighs walking around.

"Hatton is a tough guy and a pretty good puncher who likes to mug you if he can trap you on the ropes so footwork will be important in this fight. Manny will need a lot of side-to-side motion. I think it will be an exciting fight but it's one I see Manny winning."

It also is a fight Roach believes ultimately can lead them in only one direction – the direction of

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still self-exiled Floyd Mayweather, Jr.

“Most likely this fight is leading to that,” Roach admitted of the consequences of a Pacquiao victory over Hatton. “Mayweather is the only one to beat Hatton so if Manny can knock him out in spectacular fashion it makes a Mayweather fight realistic and logical even though his style is a tough style for us.”

Floyd Mayweather, Jr.’s style is tough for everyone, which is why when he sent himself into premature retirement he was both undefeated and universally acclaimed to be the best pound-for-pound fighter in the world. That mythical title now belongs to Pacquiao but perhaps before the year is out it will be decided not by people’s opinion alone but by the two of them.

If so, Roach believes it will be a risk worth the reward that could come with it, both financially and fistically.

“I think Manny is the only guy out there who can beat Mayweather,” Roach said. “After the Hatton fight, who else do we have to fight? (Former welterweight champion Miguel) Cotto is already booked to fight the (Antonio) Margarito-(Shane) Mosley winner so we really don’t have a lot of other options.”

Left to his own devices Pacquiao might dispute that however. He has already told Roach in fact that he has a proposal, one that even Roach had to laugh about.

“Manny wants to fight Margarito,” Roach said of the iron-chinned, long-armed welterweight champion who stopped the previously unbeaten Cotto by grinding him to dust in 11 brutal and bloody rounds last year. “Manny thinks he can outbox him.

“Margarito is a big welterweight. He’d have a lot of advantages physically but Manny doesn’t really worry about that. I don’t know but he believes he can beat him. He believes he can beat (Wladimir) Klitschko, too!”

While Pacquiao is uppermost on Roach’s mind, his Wild Card Gym in Hollywood is one of the busiest boxing venues in the country. Next week Roach will begin working there again with former Olympic silver medalist Amir Khan, who came to Roach after being knocked cold in less than a minute two fights ago.

Roach has won with him once since and believes he is a vastly talented fighter who has been improved by spending time in the ring sparring with Pacquiao, a fighter against whom one learns to protect your chin or pay the price for not doing so.

Where that knowledge ultimately leaves Khan not even Roach can know but off of what he’s seen he believes there is enough talent there to make Khan a champion if he can simply adhere to a regimen designed to improve defense of a chin that has shown some cracks in it.

“Amir will be here on the 10th to start training again,” Roach said of the British-born Khan. “He’ll fight again in late February or early March. I want to step up the quality of his opponent.

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“I know there are people who question his chin but a lot of that has to do with confidence. I think working with Manny helps a lot. The fact is if you don’t have a good chin it just means you have to work harder on your defense.

“Amir has a lot of talent. He really does. He just has to settle down a little bit. I think getting knocked out actually could help him. He was a little bit cocky before, always coming in looking for the knockout. You can’t just go out there throwing right hands thinking you’re going to stop everybody.”

Manny Pacquiao showed the wisdom of that advice when he first outboxed and then outfought Oscar De La Hoya in December. By May 2 he’ll be looking to do something similar to Ricky Hatton, a tough brawler who believes he can win because, after all, who has beaten him outside of the bets fighter in the world?

If Pacquiao can show him there is a new best fighter in the world who knows what could follow? Unless Juan Manuel Marquez wants to do some extra dining what seems most likely would be a showdown between the two best pound-for-pound boxers in the world – Floyd Mayweather, Jr. and Manny Pacquiao.

If it happens this year boxing fans should consider themselves blessed.